

## FREE PRESS EDITORIAL: Eco-Connections

### State spending on environment can be good for economy

June 18, 2006

Ah, pure Michigan. Too bad it's mostly lip service.

Sparkling water, clean beaches, dramatic vistas -- they're all there in the "Pure Michigan" ads at the heart of the state's new travel campaign. In the less picturesque milieu of state budgets and ongoing fights over regulation, though, it's almost as if Lansing can no longer find the word "pristine" in the dictionary.

Oh, you say, here come the tree-huggers again. Sure this is about the environment, but it's about the economy, too -- which is certain to be the deciding issue in this year's election. You're not going to attract new business and jobs to a state that doesn't look as if it can take care of itself, to a place where the natural quality of life will be allowed to deteriorate for lack of stewardship. Folks don't want to live and work where they cannot play.

Yet if you take a look at the state budget numbers, you see a slow but steady erosion in the commitment to protect Michigan's outdoor bounty. The departments of Natural Resources and Environmental Quality each operate on a shoestring. Both will crash and burn in the next few years without more support. By 2008, the DEQ faces the loss of its entire brownfield cleanup program -- now funded solely by Clean Michigan bonds. By 2010, the DNR's Game and Fish Fund will have a \$47.5-million deficit.

This has resulted from a decade-plus of pushing more and more costs onto user fees and other programs such as the bond issue. Ten years ago, the DNR got 24%

(\$50 million) of its budget from the general fund; now it's 11% (\$25 million). For the DEQ, the general fund contribution has skidded even more drastically, from 28% (\$101 million) to 9% (\$33 million) over five years.

Yes, bad economic times often lead to creative accounting. But both the DNR and DEQ deserve the kind of broad financial base that comes only from general tax dollars. Surely that's what most Michiganders expect, given their strong history of approving bond issues and ballot proposals that guard their natural resources.

Instead, the budget numbers demonstrate an increasingly shaky commitment by elected officials to clean water, well-kept parks and careful



#### WHERE THE CANDIDATES STAND

##### Dick DeVos

DeVos will release his environmental policy plans later to flesh out the short summary on his Web site. It says he will fight diversion of water outside Michigan, modernize the Department of Environmental Quality, support investment in new energy solutions and promote and protect the state's outdoor heritage. Sample: "He will reduce the time of permit decisions (whether the answer is 'yes' or 'no') to streamline the permitting process."

wildlife management. State political leaders have gone equally shaky at times in defending wetlands, most recently when lawmakers pre-empted the DEQ over how to manage plant growth and emergent wetlands along some of the Lake Michigan and Huron shoreline. It's too easy, and too glib, to make the agency a punching bag instead of standing up for the strong rules needed to maintain the water quality that Michigan touts in its travel ads and that residents so like to brag about.

This year's candidates at every level need to understand the straight line in this state between the environment and the economy. And voters need to realize how quickly and easily, without better stewardship, this "pure Michigan" can be fouled.

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**Jennifer Granholm**

"Preserving our environment is part of who are in Michigan. It's also critical to growing our state's economy. I'm proud of the extensive work my administration has done to protect our water, air and land -- including signing the toughest water protection law in our history -- while still being nimble for business. I'll continue to protect our natural resources while working to grow business."

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